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MY VISIT TO STYRIA

CAROLINE CORNER

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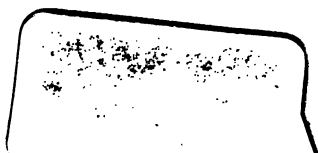


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MY VISIT TO STYRIA.

By Caroline Corner,

AUTHOR OF

"Twixt Will and Fate," "The Slinkensmirk Family," &c.



LONDON:

J. BURNS, 15, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, W.C.

And of the Author, 3, St. Thomas's Square, Hackney.

1882.

AN EDITION IN LIMP CLOTH, 1S.







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the ascent meanwhile being 1,520 feet, the descent to Mürzzuschlag 700 feet—is a masterpiece of ingenuity and perseverance, reflecting honour on the memory of its planner and constructor, our talented countryman, the late Mr. Hall.

Upon entering the Pass, the train slackens its speed. Besides being a necessary precaution, it is agreeable in that we get a good view of the truly beautiful panorama around us as we journey along.

Above : towering steepes, some barren, dark and jagged, others rich in every shade of vegetation and foliage, while others again, in the distance, are monuments of icy splendour, reflecting the myriad tints, while at the same time withstanding the warmth of the early summer's sun. Beneath : the peasant's cot, occasional groups of villages huddled together, quaint little churches dotted here and there, winding streams like serpents with shining skins of silver and gold, and humankind little more than perpendicular black-beetles in comparison with the huge, overhanging heights.

The Railway Stations alone are a gallery of pictures. O'erhung with festoons of clematis, jasmine, and trellised vine, with (supposing it to be Sunday, as it was when I first made the acquaintance of the charming Semmering Pass) gaily-dressed damsels tripping along on the arm of their *galants*; happy-faced children offering for sale gorgeous bouquets of mountain flowers, the snowy *edelweiss* arranged in all manner of devices; or glasses of "*frisches Wasser*" and plates of tempting fruit,—they resemble

scenes from opera-bouffe rather than the dreary monotony of our English country stations.

But this fairy-like scene terminates with the Semmering Pass. The train resumes its usual speed (which is never desperate on the Continent—aggravatingly the other way sometimes), and we pass through forests of pine and fir (deliciously odoriferous and health-giving), towns, villages, etc., until we come to Gratz, the capital of Styria.

As some little time is allowed here, I alighted, made a hasty repast at the buffet, then had a look round. Everybody was amused at the air of importance I assumed, and ready to do the polite and agreeable to the young *Engländerin*. The self-esteem of the English in a foreign land is proverbial. I was no exception.

Gratz is a pretty and somewhat interesting place. It is situated on the river Mur, crossed by a chain bridge. Its Cathedral contains a fine altar painting by Tintoretto, besides the tomb of Ferdinand II., husband of the Fair Phillippina, whose pictures abound in Munich and Vienna, and whose romantic history is deserving of a passing word.

It seems that the exceeding loveliness (together with many other rare and surpassing charms let us hope, for men are very stupid) of the lowly-born daughter of the Munich Burgomaster was powerful to affect the heart of the heir to the throne; indeed, to such a considerable and lasting extent, that nothing less than prostrating himself at the maiden's feet and suing her hand in marriage could satisfy the devotional yearnings of the royal lover. Witness,

then, His Highness paying thus his humble devotions, and uprising an accepted suitor, shortly to appear in the new rôle of a happy Benedict !

But, alas ! the frantic ravings of his august father—His Serene, yet irascible Majesty, Ferdinand I. ! Nought could appease his wrath ; he raved and he swore. But in this he was mistaken ; for, upon the first appearance of the bride, (who, by some feminine artifice, had gained an audience) in all her youth and beauty, becomingly bowed in sweet humility and gentle grace while telling her touching story, and suing, not for herself, but for her prince, her husband and adored—Ferdinand, the elder, (for though an emperor he was but man !) gave in, and, with arms extended, and, doubtless, feeling a spice of envy of his son and heir, swallowed his wrath, and murmured a paternal blessing over the heads of the happy young couple.

Quitting Gratz the scenery is very fine. First, we come to the grand old Castle Schlossberg, which, if the walls had tongues, might tell many a wondrous tale of troublous times. It presents a somewhat gloomy spectacle in its ruined grandeur, and suggests wild ideas of midnight, of a lady *revenante*, with raven tresses stained with gore, and from a pair of very material lungs joining in shrieking concert with the night birds, never at rest. Possessing a weird fascination for the imaginative, it likewise lends a special charm and dignity to the truly magnificent and varied scenery.

By-and-bye we reach Marburg, a military station whence

a line branches off to the Tyrol. The names of the places here are unpronounceable by English tongues; a conglomeration of consonants and diphthongs, nothing more. Welsh is easy to it. At intervals appear the ruins of many an ancient and still stately pile: conspicuous, Castles Eggensberg, Gösting, Buchsögl, and Schöckel, each having its own romantic legend, which I should dearly like to recount if space would permit.

But we must get on, as I did, only I was tired, and grubby, and lonely, and, perhaps, a trifle disagreeable, which I hope you are not.

At last, at last we reached Pöltschach! I was apprised of this fact by the forcible method of a big, burly guard entering, and, seizing me round the waist, lifting me out of the carriage as though I were a bale of goods, not even "Glass, with care." When I opened my eyes and gazed, half-dazed, around, all that I was conscious of was a wretched wilderness of a place, with a sickly attempt at lamp-light. And then, oh, such a Babel fell on my poor distracted ears! A motley throng surrounded me, all clamorous for a *trinkgeld* (in vulgar parlance, a "tip,") which I showered abundantly upon them from a big purse of English farthings, provided specially,—my money-box deposits of over a year.

Elbowing his way through the swarm came a trim little fellow, who, touching his hat, handed me a note. It was from my hostess—the Baroness Adelma Von Vay, and contained many apologies and regrets for being unable

herself to meet me at the station, on account of a bad cough, and the late hour and coldness of the night. That sufficed. I stayed not to peruse the whole contents, but, turning to the footman, explained in my best German all about my luggage. Alas! not a word did he understand. He was Hungarian; loquacious, and extremely obliging, but he might have been a Hottentot for the use he was to me. It was a plight to be in; nevertheless, I laughed and enjoyed it immensely. The coachman was fetched, an Austrian, speaking some queer *patois*, and ultimately all was made right. I jumped into the carriage and was driven away, feeling quite jubilant, notwithstanding physical exhaustion and the strangeness of the situation and surroundings.

It was then past eleven o'clock, and although so far south (not far north of the Adriatic) and well on in the month of May, a bitterly cold night, yet one of the most brilliantly starlight I ever remember. So clear it was, that every object was distinguishable as we proceeded on our two hours' drive.

* In spite of my thirty-six hours journey from Frankfort, without sleep, I could not desist from looking out at the country we were passing through, appreciating and enjoying it none the less. First impressions are often the deepest: these were mine of the Styrian scenery.

* Here let me put in a word of thanks to the Countess Clarice Karolyi, who kindly invited me to join her party, travelling to Buda-Pesth, via Vienna, and who took such care of me that the journey was truly a pleasant one to the time of our parting.

Dark lowering summits, relieved only by an occasional grey stone church set up on the brink of some precipice ; black, fir-clad mountains, sanctified by the figure on the cross ; treacherous ravines, with mad-rushing streams at the bottom ; rude altars with gaudy embellishments, standing, at intervals, along the white highroad. We passed through a village or two, but they were of a strangely primitive order, and their inhabitants were evidently in the land of Somnus, all was so still ; only a savage looking object turned out, twice or thrice, to take toll, and, judging from these apparitions, I was disposed to fancy I had climbed Jack's beanstalk, and was in the land of Blunderbore, and other terrorifying heroes of childhood. But nothing tragic occurred, and I was permitted to arrive at my destination in full possession of my luxuriant locks, not one hair of which had "turned white in a single night." Perhaps it was a trifle disappointing, it was a fact, nevertheless. •

Approached by a pair of ponderous gates, was the mountain home of my host and hostess, the Baron and Baroness Von Vay. Entering, a refreshing breeze of delicious perfumes was wafted across my face, and repeated again and again as we threaded the blossom-lined groves.

The Baroness came running out to meet me, giving utterance to her delight in welcoming her young English friend. Not expecting me until the morrow (up to the time of getting my telegram, that evening), the Baron had that morning set off with Prince Hugo of Windisgrätz, (who had gone to re-join his regiment at Marburg) and had

only just returned. Standing thus, on the threshold of their sweetly pretty villa, the Baroness looked what she is,—a beautiful and a charming woman. The light from the swinging lamp within, fell brilliantly on her flowing golden tresses, and revealed a countenance beaming with benevolence, cheerfulness, and intelligence.

The *Berlin Court Circular*, last winter, described her appearance at the Court balls, as “the beautiful Baroness Von Vay, with the classical features and golden hair.” But I really think she could have had no more becoming an appearance than she presented at the entrance-hall of her romantic mountain home. The Baron, a Hungarian, big, broad, dark as midnight, and very handsome, next came forward, and gave me a hearty, though less demonstrative, greeting; and, at once and for ever, I felt happy and at home.

I was woefully fatigued though, so, after partaking of some nice hot supper, the Baroness and her maid conducted me to my room, a large one, carpeted *à l’Anglaise*, with nothing of a foreign aspect about it, saving an elegant porcelain stove standing away from the wall, and casements opening door-fashion, through which the perfumes of budding lindens, syringas, and acacias, already in bloom, came in, despite closed frames and drawn curtains. Everything was so tasty, so cheerful, and bright, and sweet-scented, I could not refrain from exclaiming, “Oh, this is nice!” and my enthusiasm so amused old Caroline, (a namesake of mine) the Baroness’s maid, that though she understood not

a word I said, but judged only by my countenance and tone of voice, she danced round me, as the late Prince Emile Wittgenstein used to say, like a "cannibal round a fat missionary," frantically repeating, "*Küss die Hand*," (I kiss your hand) "*Küss die Hand*."

I slept soundly, and awoke next morning at eight o'clock in no wise worse for the preceding two day's fatigue, thanks to the marvellous recuperating power of the Styrian air, which made me mischievous as a sprite.

The Baron's villa is charmingly situated. Above, on the right, towers the ruined Castle of Tattenbach, 4,000 feet above the village of Gonobitz. On the left, is the more modern Castle of Prince Windisgrätz, one of the old Austrian nobility; a little beyond the village is the turretted, red-brick residence of the Baron Baltin, and sundry other castles and villas belonging to the nobility, but none more pleasing and picturesque than that of Baron Von Vay.

The village of Gonobitz is peculiarly primitive. It consists only of two streets running at right angles, down the principal of which, in the centre, bridged over at intervals, is a brook, refreshing to look at and crystal clear. Midway, they have a grandiloquent structure made of saintly figures, before which the pious people are wont to make their genuflections, and, at the same time, perform their lavations.

The buildings are of white stone, massive and imposing externally, particularly the porticoes. The Inns (Gasthofs) are conspicuous by a corn-sheaf invariably hung at the

door, in addition to the conventional sign. The stores, wherein goods of all descriptions can be purchased, are, to say the least, uninviting. Without, they can boast of little window display; within, they are grimy and untidy, and are presided over by wondrously grotesque specimens of humanity. The dwellings of the officials and gentry, from an outside view, are commodious and attractive, but within! Comfort is a state undreamt of in Styrian middle-class domestic economy. Our meagre English homesteads are luxurious, compared with theirs of a wealthier order. Far different is it with the nobility, however. Between the two classes is a vast distinction.

Gonobitz is picturesque and pleasing: its climate health-giving, its environs beautiful and enjoyable. The sun at noon bathes the surrounding mountains in a lovely golden gleam; at sunset, in a soft crimson glow; at eventide, enshrouds the whole scene in a blue-grey shadowy veil. However intense the heat of the day, the evenings are cool; the nights, ablaze with stars, or softened by the hallowing, soul-inspiring moonbeams, are fresh and exhilarating. I really don't know which is the best time—all are so lovely.

Our daily programme, although always diversified, was made up of riding, driving, walking, paying visits, entertaining, and last, but not least, for the Baroness is a veritable humanitarian, comforting the afflicted and distressed.

The peasant population maintain an implacable faith in her power to alleviate pain. From far and near, they bring

their sick for her tender ministration ; and, in her boudoir, I found many an offering in token of some great good she had done, some rich blessing she had wrought for those who, if poor in purse, were rich in gratitude towards their noble benefactress.

It was touching to see this beautiful, high-born lady, tending some poor unfortunate creature, bent and racked with pain. It was gratifying, too, to remark the growing light come into the hollow, sunken eyes, as they followed each movement of their "*Frau Gräfin*," whilst busy preparing that which would bring relief to the sufferer. Besides this, the Baroness's bright face is ever a welcome sight in all the homesteads of the poorest and lowliest in the district, and many lips breathe blessings upon her for her goodness and generosity.

It was our custom to take long drives to all the places of interest in the neighbourhood, for nothing seemed to afford my kind friends greater pleasure than to behold my countenance beaming with joy. Upon one of these occasions we visited the ruins of a celebrated abbey and monastery, Sätz, which had been in the possession of the silent order of Carthusians, and concerning which the Baroness Von Vay has written an interesting story, in her work *Studien über die Geisterwelt*.

Another time, by invitation, we went to a cherry party, held at a pretty vine-house, at the top of a small mountain, whence we had a glorious and extensive view, not to forget the delicious fruits, and, of course, not so rude as to men-

tion the incessant chatter-chatter-chatter of the foreigners. The Baron, who is not one of the garrulous order, used to murmur, *sotto voce*, for my edification, "Chat-ter-ing apes," and forthwith set me off into fits of laughter. *Apropos*, I must relate one anecdote of the Baron's delightfully comic English. I am sure he will forgive me ; it is quite too good to omit. One day, whilst walking through the village, a young lady passed us, and greeted in the usual way—" *Küss die Hand,' Herr Baron; Küss die Hand,' Frau Gräfin; Küss die Hand,' Fräulein.*"

I then asked,—Who is she? to which the Baroness made answer—"Oh, she is one of the rival belles of Gonobitz—the lawyer's daughter." "Yes," said the Baron, "formerly—she was—pretty ; but now—I see—she begins to receive—a fleshy nose!"

And now I must tell of myself.

Seated one evening, at dinner, beside a certain young prince of royal blood, who, no doubt, was fully conscious of his handsome figure, I ventured a complimentary remark about the German culinary art, in my very best German. The muscles of His Serene Highness's face began to twitch as he stared me straight in the eyes, and, at length, he broke out into such laughter that the attention of the entire company was arrested. At a word or two, all the other guests joined in the merriment at my expense. I grew very warm, and felt more inclined to cry than laugh myself, when somebody, having compassion, explained that I had informed the Prince that he had "bandy legs;" and then

I went into convulsions of laughter, but I didn't air my German again for some time.

Another day, we paid a visit to Oplotnitz, which boasts of a large glass manufactory, wherein I was permitted to blow and mould a tumbler, a feat I was very proud of and much interested in. The process was simple and rapid. In one large building, huge mills were in brisk operation, grinding stone to powder. This powder having undergone some technical preparation is put into cauldrons, on the top of furnaces, ablaze in another large uncouth building. Into these boiling cauldrons, the workers—men and boys—dip long hollow rods, and taking up a small quantity of the ingredients, now in a liquid state, commence to blow the reverse end with all their might, until, from a mere drop, the bubble expands into a huge hanging bladder. This, then, is gently lowered into a wooden mould near by, which, at a touch, springs to and grips the soft impressionable contents, fashioning it into its own particular shape. The rod is then detached, and exchanged for one which branches off like a pair of tweezers. With this, in about half a minute, the article, be it tumbler, bottle, jug, (in which case it would still have to undergo the process of handling) or decanter, is taken out of the mould, and put into a pail of warm water, hissing and fizzing, for it is at white and red heat. After this, it has to remain for a time in a furnace, to be rendered hard and durable by baking. Looking through the little gratings, one sees dozens of glass utensils lying higgledy-piggledy amongst the red-hot

embers. The furnaces are upon a circular platform, the *employés* standing in front, one furnace allotted to every three men. Each has a mould, two rods, and a pail of water to himself. The work goes on smoothly, without let or hindrance, and with scarcely any noise. But the heat the poor fellows have to endure is terrible ; they are all as in a vapour bath.

The Bacher mountains, surrounding Oplotnitz, are lofty and commanding. In the centre of the village there is a quaint little antique chapel, containing a richly-stained window and an altar laden with relics, the offerings of penitents, miserable sinners, no doubt !

But infinitely more beautiful is Weitenstein, famous for its marble, from which it takes its name, White Stone ; likewise, for its two grand old castles, overlooking a hollow in the mountains, down which crystal streams of icy water are continually coursing into the brook below. Three or four wooden bridges lead across the chasm and the stream to the dear old water-mill, which no one can discredit is the veritable *Mülenrad* of the popular song. Weitenstein is deserving of poetic renown : one could not be prosaic nor commonplace there. Everything is so romantic, so ideal, almost sublime ! The human voice thrills with a strange effect down in the chasm, and its echo is caught up and repeated again and again. I used to like to hear the Baroness give the *jodel*, (the peasant's peculiar cry) in her clear and ringing voice ; but sometimes our laughter would *be echoed and re-echoed*, with such a startling and weird

effect, that, for the moment, it was terrifying in its mocking supernaturalism.

Now, shortly after my advent, the Feast of Corpus Christi came round. As a Protestant, and an inquisitive woman, I was anxious to see how this great *fête* was kept, therefore, gladly availed myself of the Baroness's invitation, to accompany her upon the said occasion. Consequently, when the day (Sunday) came, together we first attended mass at 9 a.m., being seated in a sort of upper private box, with windows overlooking the chancel, and, sideways, down the crowded church and aisles. It was a pleasing sight, those hundreds of poor people, dressed in their very best, all on their knees piously fingering their rosaries and muttering their prayers—men, women, and children, all alike. The church was tastefully decorated: the altar adorned with flowers; the images arrayed in fresh draperies; garlands and bouquets everywhere.

Mass ended, all who chose were to walk in procession round the town. The priests came first, bearing the Corpus Christi beneath a gaily embroidered canopy, through clouds of incense arising from censers swung by acolytes on either side. The Baroness, in company with some of her noble friends, the Baroness Baltin and her niece,—a fashionable young lady from Vienna—etc., etc., and myself, came next, followed by the authorities and gentry of the place in their order of social rank. Then the young women, with new cotton handkerchiefs, all of different hues and patterns, pinned crossways over the head, each bearing a gorgeous

banner in her stout bare arms. After them, the bachelors, got up in their newest and best; then, the children, ditto, ditto; and, lastly, the trembling old folk, ditto, ditto, ditto. The streets had been gaily decked the day before. Double rows of fir-trees lined either side, and across were slung roses and evergreens, and banners with all sorts of devices and inscriptions, while the casements were heaped up with flowers, and the general appearance was of rejoicing. The rude stone altars along the route, had not escaped their share of decoration. Candles burned feebly in the brilliant June sunshine, and the figures of the Christ were wreathed with flowers, the Madonnas newly robed and adorned. At these altars the whole procession knelt, while prayers and thanksgivings were chaunted in a depressing minor key. Then, uprising, we would proceed at slow pace, to the equally as unenlivening strains of a wailing brass band, assisted by a chorus of desultory voices, each fingering the rosary with devout and downcast head, yet keeping half an eye on the "English Fräulein," to see "how she behaved." This ended, the custom is to terminate the holiday in the way of all festivities, be it Catholic or Protestant; and right well did many of the good people do homage to this international custom, as the keepers of the various *Gasthofs* could testify. For ourselves, we parted from the rank and file ere the ceremony was half over; the heat and other intangible disagreeables were having an overpowering effect upon us—we were glad to get away.*

* *I may mention here, that since my visit to the Baroness Adelsma*

One of the most delightful excursions we made, was to Neukloster, the Castle-home of Count Wurmbrand, brother of the Baroness Adelma Von Vay, whose family, the Wurmbrand, is one of the oldest and best of the Austrian nobility.

It was during the intense heat of July, so, in order to spare both the horses and ourselves, we set off from Gonobitz at 2.30 a.m., taking our coffee, of course, by candle-light. The day bid fair to be fine. The dawn-mist uplifted, we felt, as we drove along, four-in-hand,—the Baron and the Hungarian groom on the box, the Baroness and myself inside the carriage—truly rewarded for our moral courage and energy in such early rising. All being still at rest we could thoroughly enjoy the ever-varying beauty of the scenery, without our attention being distracted ; and it *was* enjoyable. Now we passed along the white highroad, with broad meadow-lands on one side, blue, and red, and yellow with wild flowers, and verdure so rich that that part of the country is called “Green Styria.” On the opposite side, perhaps, a low-lying vale, mossy and fern-grown, with a peasant’s cot, always trim and cleanly, in a sheltered nook half way down ; a picturesque water-mill on a silvery meandering stream at the bottom ; and, not far off, the dear inevitable old church perched up high on rocky mount.

By and bye our route lay between crags that frowned so heavily, that entering the pass was to merge into semi-darkness. But even here, in this savage domain, were tokens

Von Vay, ~~that~~ lady has left the Roman Catholic Church and become a Protestant.

of human aspiration after higher, nobler things. On many of the jagged steepes a crucifix, bent and mildewed with age, yet remains to tell a speechless penitent tale. Sermons in stones, indeed !

Farther on we sighted a famous old castle—Lindeck, majestic in its altitude (about 5,000 feet), majestic, still, in its ruins, and fascinating in its past romantic history, which, alas ! has a woefully prosaic sequel, in the fact of its (the ruins) having been bought of a peasant, some year or two ago, for the sum of 10 gülden, scarcely £1 !

Beyond this a few miles we had a grand view.

If we considered ourselves repaid before, doubly so did we now. The sun had risen, and now swam a golden barque in an ocean of red. The towering heights of the Bernese Alps in the distance caught the tints, and through the glaciers reflected as through a prism a variety of colours—softened, subdued. It were difficult to say where the glaciers ended, where the sky began. It was like gazing upon a lovely fairy scene, far up in the unfathomable depths of the sky, or upon some mystic world open only to the spirit eyes. I was charmed, enchanted with the scene.

But the vision was not lasting. A turn in the road, and it was gone. And now for some distance the country was flat and uninteresting. Only an occasional habitat arrested our attention, and that not for long, for one soon grows accustomed to the neatly painted windows, with fuchias and oleanders on the sill : the stone steps with wooden balustrade leading up to the entrance, which is always imposing

let the house be ever so humble, its inmates ever so poor. So on as far as Cilli: the Baroness and I shortening the journey by singing lively songs.

This Cilli is a queer outlandish place. It has its streets, its shops, and its Gasthofs; but there is a quaint originality about them all. The inhabitants are to match. To attempt to describe them were vain. Take, as the nearest pattern, a figure from an antique engraving: exaggerate the oddities, magnify the enormities, and you have the best idea that I can convey. To say that they are absolutely ugly would be false. They are odd.

A heavy toll is imposed here, the third since we started. At the principal Gasthof we alighted to refresh man and beast. The heat was becoming great. It was now half past seven o'clock, and we were beginning to feel fatigued. After rest and light refreshment, we continued our journey, the inhabitants of the town flocking to their doors and windows, and standing open-mouthed in the middle of the street, to witness our departure. I like Cilli. In it one enters another world, and it is a relief, for a time at least.

Upon leaving Cilli, the country improves again, and is studded here and there with fine palatial residences, many, the homes of friends and acquaintances of my noble host and hostess.

One in particular impressed me, not solely on account of its size and magnificence, but for the fact of a peculiarity in the marble figure of the Madonna, set up at the entrance to the grounds. With hands extended before her, the

palms turned out, her drapery in graceful flowing folds, her sweet, sad countenance downcast, I was surprised to remark the third finger of the left hand was bent beneath ; and, upon asking the reason, received the following explanation.

The head of the family and owner of the estate, a brave and high-born prince, had, ere he joined the Crusade, committed himself to the keeping of the Madonna. Not content with this, he had, as he termed it, "espoused the blessed Virgin" and "consecrated both body and soul to her." None other should usurp her place in his heart, he vowed as he placed the betrothal ring upon her finger.

He left his home : he joined the Crusade ; he fought heroically. Ultimately he was wounded, and forced to retire from action. His wounds were severe : he suffered acutely. But a ministering angel was ever by his side to attend, to solace, to relieve. This, a woman, a mortal, a high-born noble like himself !

Thanks to her unflagging patience, her skill, and tender care, his hours of agony were softened and diminished. When he arose alive, and comparatively well, it was to her, he was told, and he felt and knew it, that he owed his release from the jaws of death. To *her* ! He looked at the sylph-like form and thought, "To *her* !" And his manly heart yearned.

Forgotten, or if remembered, stifled were the other old vows, the other old love. This woman was young, she was beautiful, she had saved his life ; and—stealing a long

glance at her again—Yes! she had learned to love him: there was no doubt about that. And he—well, he married her without a thought of his old love.

Taking his beautiful young bride home to his proud domain, he stayed to bend the knee once more before the pale image of the Madonna—when, lo! to his amazement, of course not terror, of this great and courageous prince, the finger, still wearing the betrothal-tie, bent slowly beneath, so that the remaining fingers well nigh hid the plain band of gold. Alas! Alas! Another bride had been chosen: another had taken the Madonna's place.

What degree of truth there may be in this romantic story, I cannot pretend to say. The fact alone remains of the elegant figure of the Madonna, with the marriage finger bent beneath—another testimony to the perfidy of man!

It was well on towards nine o'clock when we reached our destination, Neukloster, the home of the Count and Countess Wurmbrand. The castle is but a short drive from the village of Neuhaus, in the Valley of the Sann, called after the river flowing through. A splendid avenue of elms, a quarter of a mile in length, leads up to the noble pile, which dates back to an early period, when originally it was a monastery belonging to an order of memorable name and fame; concerning whom there are many weird and sensational stories, not confined to their doings whilst in the flesh either. From the courtyard, a double flight of steps conducts to a broad stone terrace, in the centre of which is the principal entrance to the castle.

Above is another terrace, under shelter of a still loftier belvedere, which last commands a magnificent view for miles and miles around—of blue-grey mountain tops lost in the azure skies; of the winding, pearly river; of an occasional stately abode of some great lord; of forests of pine, green meads, and fields of yellow, waving corn; indeed, of everything that goes to make up scenery the grandest and loveliest on earth. At either end of the castle a flagstaff waves from a steepled turret, signifying that my lord and lady are at home, whilst at one side and adjoining is the chapel, whose vesper bell rings at eight o'clock, morning and evening, to summon the retainers and all good Catholics to prayers. Within the castle, every comfort is attended to with the perfection of refinement and good taste: all that mortal could desire. Moreover there is that warmth and ease which can only exist where the host and hostess are both large and open hearted. As at Gonobitz I rejoiced to find such true hospitality, and the result was I felt happy and at home.

Other guests besides ourselves were staying at the Castle—a Countess a relative of the Wurmbrand family, and an Italian Baroness, both devout Catholics, both young, the latter speaking good English: the former none at all.

The chamber I occupied was large and sombre with the sacred solemnity of age. Here again comfort was attended to; but it had that eeriness about it which is peculiar and inevitable to old age—of the neuter gender, I mean: old people I am most sympathetic with; old people I adore—

when they are not selfish and crusty. Had I been of a nervous temperament I should not altogether have relished spending the night alone in that weird chamber, shut off from all the other sleeping apartments by a huge oaken door midway down the long picture-lined corridor ; especially as shortly before our arrival the Count and his butler had had an experience which they both declared and maintained was of a supernatural order ; not to mention the many wild legends in connexion with the old place. But nothing came to disturb my rest : mine was the sleep of the innocent, sound and secure, I presume.

Morning came, and we spent the time till luncheon in walking about the grounds, sitting on the terraces, the ladies with their fancy-work, the gentlemen with their cigars, both with the voluble exercise of their tongues ; or roaming in the wooded park collecting mosses and ferns, rowing on the lake, paying visits to the stables and cow sheds (it is all indoor grazing in Austria !), or swinging in hammocks to the fairy music of an Æolian harp played by the light summer's breeze.

In the evening after dinner we made merry in the drawing rooms, singing songs of all nations. The Count and Countess Wurmbrand were highly pleased with my English songs. The Baroness Adelma Von Vay has a fine, cultured voice, but for all that she was not above and beyond appreciating a simple Scotch or Irish ballad, and—this in a whisper—was always ready to help in the chorus of my loudly applauded ladies' serio-comics, the favourite

being "The Captain with his Whiskers," in which all united heartily, if not in English any other language. Imagine! Of course the Austrian National Anthem was not forgotten, neither were Rule Britannia, and God save the Queen; my kind friends took care of this. They admired my strong spirit of patriotism.

During our stay at Neukloster we witnessed a splendid sight—a terrific thunderstorm. Suddenly as it was severe it came on; the great black clouds gathering thick and fast over the mountains until they were enveloped in a huge pall. Then the lightning came and rent the darkness in a jagged glare: each flash a different colour, blue, red, purple, amber, green, mauve; and for the moment the whole scene was brilliant before us, lit up by the tinted electric light. It was a sight I shall never forget. I would fain have remained on the terrace until the storm had ceased; but the lightning assuming a dangerous character my friends would not rest until they got me to go within.

Our visit to Neukloster terminated in a few days, and the least I can say is that it was a truly enjoyable one.

We set off in the same fashion as we came: Baron Von Vay driving four-in-hand, supported by his faithful Hungarian, the Baroness and myself inside the carriage, each with a baby-pug upon our laps which caused us no end of amusement *en route*.

We left the Castle at 5 p.m., a warm and lovely evening; but towards nine o'clock the air became extremely chilly, *suddenly*, as it is apt to do there. By and bye we were

waylaid by another of those terrific thunderstorms which had become so fashionable during the summer; but, as it shewed no signs of abating, we wrapped ourselves up, had the hood hoisted, lined the Baron's straw hat with our neck and pocket-handkerchiefs, equipped the young Hungarian in a suit of mackintosh mail, and pressed on merrily through all.

Another journey we undertook was to the Castle of Baron Bourgillon, some thirty miles east of Trieste. At the same early hour we set off, in the same fashion, arriving about 10.30 a.m., after a break mid-way for breakfast. Our host together with his two young daughters were most kind in providing everything for our amusement and enjoyment. While there I had an opportunity of upholding the dignity of my sex and nationality in taking the first prize at a shooting tournament.

The Castle, though small, is elegant and pleasantly situated. The girls complain of the dreariness, though: they scarcely ever remove from home; at the same time, they receive every indulgence from their devoted father. To me, it would be a gilded cage, against the bars of which I should beat my wings, until I effected some sort of egress, I know; but then all young ladies are not "*wild roses!*"

The drive home was delightful. The moon rose, and beamed upon us most of the way, and the evening was still and warm.

The domestics at Gonobitz were rejoiced to have us home again. Jacob, the butler, a comical old fellow, who had

been in the service of the Von Vay family over fifty years, blinked and winked, and blinked again with satisfaction, while Caroline curtsayed, and smirked, and simpered, and moistened our hands all over with kisses, and the faces of all the rest shone with gladness. They are an exceedingly faithful retinue; and each and all became much attached to the "English Fräulein," from the young Hungarian groom—who would have my picture to hang in his stables—to old Jacob, who, when the soldiers were stationed in the village, used to come blinking and winking to me, exclaiming: "*Fräulein—Officiern kommen!*" and away I would scamper, *to see the horses*, of course! But the Baron always looked grave at this, for, as he, in his paternal way, would say, "while there" I was "in his care," and he "did not want an escape," (an elopement!).

I used to thoroughly enjoy wandering about the grounds, mounted on my dear Riggo, a fine horse of Arab and Hungarian breed. It was not safe to venture outside the gates, unless under the protection of a powerful escort; there were brigands and other bad people about. But it was glorious to thread the shady, winding groves, and have the sweet-scented blossoms sweeping across one's face, the fragrance was delicious! And then to swing in a hammock, under the lindens, by the orange and the myrtle, and think of all my friends at home; and, in the evening, to run after fire-flies, and afterwards to come in and have music, the Baroness (who can play many instruments) and myself at the piano, the Baron playing the zither more beautifully

than I ever heard it played by anyone else, so touchingly, it made the tears come into my eyes ; and, after all, to say "good-night," only to awake next morning to another day of happiness and enjoyment.

For a week or two in July the heat was so excessive that, in order to prevent the hot air rushing in, it was necessary to shut the house up, close the windows, and draw the outside Venetian blinds. In this way, the rooms were kept tolerably cool ; but to venture out at mid-day was hazardous, the sun was so apt to strike. I was sorely tempted by a fair in the village,—I do love a village fair—but the Baron was firm in this, that we were not to venture ; so, to soften the disappointment, kind, good man, that he is, went himself, and returned laden with a strange cargo of "sacred hearts" of sugared gingerbread, monster peasant-knives that could do anything but cut, wondrous musical instruments of the Punch and Judy order, rosaries, dolls, mirrors, &c., &c. The flies, too, were such a pest to the horses, that we invariably rode early in the morning, before the heat came on. Our drives and walks we took after five o'clock, when the sun's might was abating, and the atmosphere was redolent with the odour of the linden, acacia, magnolia, gladiolus, and, later on, the orange and the myrtle.

I was at this time working a pretty Russian jersey, after the pattern of one of the Baroness's, and used to have a musical-box beside me, playing repeatedly my favourite air, the Jewel-song from *Faust*. Now, when at times I am down-hearted, and feeling, in fact, miserable, in fancy I

often hear the sweet tones of that well-remembered box, playing a few bars of that self-same tune, and, for an instant, all the old associations revive, and I am in Styria again, careless and happy in the charming mountain-home of my dear, kind friends. This memory will haunt me to my dying-day; and if, perchance, the world turn cold and frown upon me, *it* will still remain to strengthen and sustain, by telling a sweet glad story of happiness and youth when the world *did* smile upon me, and seemed all love and truth.

And now for a last word concerning the beauties of the Styrian scenery.

A truly lovely sight were the fields of blue forget-me-nots, their soft-toned azure eclipsing the brilliant verdure of the grass, which served only as a delicate mounting. Adjoining, a patch of white forget-me-nots, thrown up by the like ornamental mounting, and looking chaste, and cool, and pearl-like in the emerald setting. Overhead, the beautiful, changeful sky; around, the evening's gathering mist, spreading like a veil over the purple, golden-tinted mountains, of soft aerial blue, until they appear to dissolve into the night's dark shades, and are lost. Then the stars come out, and light up the heavens with tier upon tier of lamps, while, beneath, the earth is illumined by fire-flies, and a light breeze wafts delicious fragrance from the drooping, blossom-laden branches of the winding groves.

Alas! the time came when I must bid adieu to all these beauties of nature; but, hard as was that, I found it not one whit so hard as parting from my friends, the Baron

and Baroness Von Vay. Combined with her captivating charms of manner and person the Baroness possesses a mind that never wearies, an original mind; a heart ever ready to respond to sympathy or need, an unselfish, generous and feeling heart: whilst the Baron, in addition to his laurels won on the battle-field, holds the full and complete equipment of a gentleman, a *true-born nobleman*. Little wonder that I was loathe to part from such agreeable and indulgent companions and friends.

But the day arrived. My host and hostess conducted me to the railway station at Pöltschach one lovely autumn morning: we were all feeling very down-hearted but did our best to be lively and pass it off. Just in time. My luggage attended to, my ticket and seat secured, the Baroness and I could only indulge in a hurried embrace, but I saw tears in her eyes, and then good bye to the Baron, who heaped parental blessings on my head, and joined in his dear wife's reminders that I "*must* come again next summer" and "always consider their happy home my own." The tinkle-tinkle of the departure bell, I jumped into the train and was borne away, catching a farewell glimpse of waving pocket-handkerchiefs through a pair of misty dark eyes; and then—I gave myself up to weeping piteously until we reached Bruck, my travelling companion, the wife of an eminent Austrian scientist, doing her utmost in every possible way to comfort and console me. She supposed I must be going back to school!

But there were other pleasures in store for me: my

lucky star had not set yet. Some other time I should like to recount the doings of my visits to Vienna and Munich, and my sojourn at the romantic Villa Fluhli on the banks of the beautiful lake Lucerne; but, for the present, must say good bye, with many thanks to those kind friends by whose generosity I am enabled to retain in print one of the sweetest recollections of my young life.

Styrer Alpenlied.

HOCH vom Dachstein an, wo der Aar noch haust,
Bis zum Wendenland am Belt der Saa',
Wo die Sennerin frohe Jodler singt,
Und der Jäger kühn sein Jagdrohr schwingt;
Dieses schöne Land ist der Steyrer-Land,
Ist mein liebes, theures Heimath-land.

Wo im dunkeln Wald froh das Rehlein springt,
Droben auf zur steilen Berges höh',
Wo das Bächlein klar aus den Gletschern rinnt,
Und die Gemse klimmt am Felsenrand;
Dieses schöne Land ist der Steyrer-Land,
Ist mein liebes, theures Heimath-land.

Wenn im Thal der Alp' die Schalmei ertönt,
Unter Glockenklang mit heiterm Lied,
Komm der Hirtenbub mit den Küh'n daheim,
Abends zu der allerliebsten Magd;
Dieses schöne Land ist der Steyrer-Land,
Ist mein liebes, theures Heimath-land.

